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## **Between erudition and faith. Jean-Jacques Chifflet's tract on the shroud of Besançon (1624)**

von Wyss-Giacosa, Paola

**Abstract:** The shroud of Besançon, a large cloth considered a precious relic as an “imprint” left by Christ’s body on his burial linen, experienced a period of intense veneration and public debate from the early 16th century to the end of the 18th century. With the publication of ‘De linteis sepulchralibus Christi servatoris crisis historica’ (Antwerp, 1624), a treatise that was as erudite as it was intellectually and conceptually biased, the Besançon author Jean-Jacques Chifflet significantly contributed to perceptions of his local shroud and its reception. A noteworthy selection of visual material that included the very first reproduction of the shroud of Besançon in a print medium was an important part of the book’s argument. This article offers a close reading of sections of Chifflet’s treatise, with particular attention given to the author’s targeted use of engravings as ‘illustrationes’ (images meant, quite literally, to illuminate the text, its meaning and intention), and thus explores the representation of a local relic as a part and product of a cultural practice and of shared notions.

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*Le S. SUAIRE de TURIN.  
vu par  
derrière.*



*Le S. SUAIRE de TURIN.  
vu par  
devant.*



*Le S. SUAIRE de BEZANÇON.*



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JOURNAL FOR RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

2019

05/01

Cristiana Facchini and Paola von Wyss-Giacosa (eds.)

**Understanding Jesus in the  
Early Modern Period and Beyond  
Across Text and Other Media**

**SCHÜREN**

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# Between Erudition and Faith

## Jean-Jacques Chifflet's Tract on the Shroud of Besançon (1624)

### ABSTRACT

The shroud of Besançon, a large cloth considered a precious relic as an “imprint” left by Christ’s body on his burial linen, experienced a period of intense veneration and public debate from the early 16th century to the end of the 18th century. With the publication of *De linteis sepulchralibus Christi servatoris crisis historica* (Antwerp, 1624), a treatise that was as erudite as it was intellectually and conceptually biased, the Besançon author Jean-Jacques Chifflet significantly contributed to perceptions of his local shroud and its reception. A noteworthy selection of visual material that included the very first reproduction of the shroud of Besançon in a print medium was an important part of the book’s argument. This article offers a close reading of sections of Chifflet’s treatise, with particular attention given to the author’s targeted use of engravings as *illustrationes* (images meant, quite literally, to illuminate the text, its meaning and intention), and thus explores the representation of a local relic as a part and product of a cultural practice and of shared notions.

### KEYWORDS

Jean-Jacques Chifflet, Shroud of Besançon, Book Illustration, Catholic Relic, Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*

### BIOGRAPHY

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During the early modern age, a large linen cloth considered a precious relic was the object of a remarkable popular devotion in the city of Besançon, in the eastern region of Franche-Comté. The fabric, constituted of two panels sewn together lengthwise, is said to have measured 8 feet in length and almost 4 feet in width, thus about 2.5 meters by 1.2 meters. The frontal imprint of a man's naked body, with five wounds, one to each hand and foot and one on the chest, was visible on its front and back. It was believed not to have been made by human hands, but rather to be a trace, an "imprint" left by Christ's body. During its substantiated period of veneration, from the early 16th century until the end of the 18th century, this winding sheet was first preserved in a chapel within the cathedral of Saint-Etienne and, after the church was abandoned in the later 17th century and the building subsequently demolished, in the cathedral of Saint-Jean. Famous far and wide, it received particular devotion and was the focus of religious beliefs, practices, liturgies and public ostensions celebrated on a regular basis two times a year, at Easter and on Ascension Day.<sup>1</sup> For a time it was a serious competitor for the prestigious and already well-publicized shroud of the House of Savoy, which was displayed for some time in the historical capital of the Savoy region, Chambéry, and subsequently, from the late 16th century, in Piedmont, in the ducal court's newly instituted capital, Turin.<sup>2</sup> The winding sheet of Besançon was a reason for pride in the city and also a source of considerable income, an important element in the social and political identity of a region proud to be a Habsburg island in a sea of French territory.<sup>3</sup> During the French Revolution, the cloth was sent to Paris and examined by the National Convention. It was judged to be a fraud, painted by some artist as a prop probably used in the liturgical performance of Easter Passion plays and certainly not the sacred touch relic it had been claimed to be for almost three centuries. A stencil found in the church's premises was used as additional proof of the sly farce that counted many credulous people as its victims.<sup>4</sup> The historical sources suggest the cloth was deliberately destroyed: the National Convention, after a series of consultations in the spring of 1794, ruled that it should be taken out of circulation for good by being cut into strips for wound dressing.<sup>5</sup>

1 Cf. Spinelli-Flesch 2004; Vregille 2004.

2 The Besançon cloth may most likely have been a copy of the Turin shroud. Many sources confirm and in fact describe the making of such official "facsimiles", painted copies, commissioned by members of the Savoy ducal court. Upon their completion they would briefly be put in contact with the Turin Shroud and thus "loaded". Cf. Marcelli 2004, 56–57; Cozzo 2010, 60–61; Nicolotti 2015.

3 Cozzo 2010, 63.

4 Interestingly, a discussion about a stencil and the problem of life-size copies had already occurred in the early 17th century and supposedly had led to the stencil's destruction. Cf. Marcelli 2004, 61; Spinelli-Flesch 2004, 49.

5 Cf. Baciocchi/Julia 2009, 487–488; 537–546.

Thus runs a brief account of the rise and fall of one of the many Catholic relics venerated in Europe. With the physical object gone, or at least untraceable, the end of its fame and its eventual disappearance from collective memory might have been expected (as was certainly the intention of the National Convention). Instead, as a result of a noteworthy media presence, it has remained to this day one of the textile relics regularly mentioned within many-faceted sindonology discourses.

Since the middle of the 15th century, there had been particular interest in the cult of the shroud, in the veneration of an image-relic of the martyred body of Jesus. The shroud of Besançon was one of several textile objects that experienced, as a result, a period of intense veneration and public debate, in the course of which various texts and, maybe even more influential, many images of the winding sheet were produced and circulated: life-size and large paintings, embroideries and jewels, as well as small prints and protective medals for the many pilgrims.<sup>6</sup> A hagiography of this particular cloth was developed and carried forward, elaborating on its history and authenticity as well as on its relationship with other textile touch relics. With the publication of *De linteis sepulchralibus Christi servatoris crisis historica* (About a historical decision on the burial shrouds of Christ the Savior) in the early 17th century, the Besançon physician and scholar Jean-Jacques Chifflet (1588–1660) sought to bring about a decisive moment in perceptions of the local shroud and its reception, as the last part of the title of his Latin tract boldly suggested. In it he discussed the Besançon linen extensively, presenting the reading public with a thesis that, though not undisputed, would be referred to well into the 18th century.<sup>7</sup> Chifflet's was an erudite author's work, quoting contemporary influential scholars and publications as well as older sources, both religious and secular. The author gave singular importance and a role of its own to the winding sheet, arguing that while the Turin shroud had received the body of Christ at the moment of the deposition from the cross, the shroud in Besançon was the linen that had subsequently enveloped the corpse in the tomb. Chifflet was a scholar, but at the same time he was also a citizen of Besançon and a man with an overt loyalty to the Habsburgs.<sup>8</sup> He was also a Catholic with strong family links to the church, and more particularly to the Jesuits.<sup>9</sup> Quite obviously, his treatise was intellectually and conceptually

6 The earliest reproductions were painted copies by the Besançon artist Pierre d'Argent from the second half of the 16th century. The production of prints is known from the 17th century on. For an overview and a discussion on the iconography of the shroud of Besançon, see Gauthier 1883 and Marcelli 2004.

7 Cf. for instance Latendresse 2015 for an interesting discussion of two source documents arguing for and against the authenticity of the shroud of Besançon respectively.

8 The Chifflet were a lineage of civil servants and learned men from Besançon. They were loyal protégés of the Habsburgs and the court in Brussels. At the time the region was under Spanish dominion and as a result of old dynastic relationships was ruled from Brussels. Cf. Vregille 2007.

9 One of Jean-Jacques Chifflet's brothers, Pierre-François, was a Jesuit.

biased, but this notwithstanding, in its time it contributed significantly to broadening the reputation and establishing the cult of the Besançon shroud as an authentic sacred relic. As tendentious and problematic as one may judge Chifflet's disquisition to be, it was still highly learned, well-reasoned and followed a clear argumentative structure in its efforts at legitimization. In fact, Chifflet put up a whole system of references, aided by a noteworthy selection of visual material, in his tract. His argument thus seems a very interesting, and hitherto not much studied, case within early modern discourses about Jesus – this in both a historical and a religious context, as it addresses questions of the potential and limits of scholarship, of faith and of propaganda. The illustrations, in all their intended heterogeneity in terms of their sources and figurative style, merit careful examination, for the author selected some and commissioned others to corroborate his central points.

I therefore provide here a close reading of parts of Chifflet's treatise, with particular attention given to his targeted use of engravings as *illustrationes* (images meant to, quite literally, illuminate the text, its meaning and intention), thus looking at this representation of a local relic as a part and a product of a cultural practice and of shared notions.

## AN EARLY 17TH-CENTURY TREATISE ON THE FUNERARY LINEN OF CHRIST

The editio princeps of *De linteis sepulchralibus Christi servatoris crisis historica* was published in 1624 at the renowned Plantin press in Antwerp. The print run was 800 copies,<sup>10</sup> allowing for wide distribution and circulation of the tract. A few years earlier, Chifflet had presented the public with a book on the past and present of his hometown. Titled *Vesontio, civitas imperialis libera, sequanorum metropolis* (*Vesontio [Besançon], free imperial city, metropolis of the Sequani people*) and published in Leiden in 1618, it was the first monograph dedicated to Besançon and featured rich references to and illustrations of historical evidence such as archaeological finds and coins.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, *De linteis sepulchralibus* was conceived by the author as a follow-up to the previous volume, presenting the local winding sheet in such a way that the readers would consider it to be the most important treasure of Besançon. Keeping in mind the competition between the various relic cults of the time, we should note an intriguing correspondence to another pair of books: around four decades earlier the Savoy

10 The price of a volume was 30 stuivers. Cf. Waterschoot 2005, 346. A French version (*Hiérothonie de Jesus-Christ ou Discours des Saints Suaire de nostre Seigneur*, Paris: Cramoisy, 1631) as well as a second Latin edition (Antwerp: Plantin, 1688) followed.

11 Vregille 2007, 113–134.

ducal court historian Emanuele Filiberto Pingone (1525–1582) had published *Augusta Taurinorum* (Turin, 1577), a book that, with the ancient Roman name as its title, was dedicated to the city of Turin, the court’s recently instituted new capital. Pingone’s employers had also commissioned a publication on its famous shroud. *Sindon evangelica* (*The Evangelical Shroud*), the title of the small book that appeared after some delay in 1581, was the very first printed publication on this cloth, which was said to be a central holy relic of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

It can be argued that for his endeavor Chifflet decided to adopt, and improve upon, the Savoy court’s media strategy; it had indeed proven very successful in publicizing the Turin shroud. Clearly, Jean-Jacques Chifflet was for his part very much a panegyrist of his hometown and of its Habsburg rulers. A practicing physician as well as an antiquarian and author, he came from a well-known and learned family in Besançon. His father, Jean, had been the main physician of the city and had a keen interest for history and antiquities. One uncle, Claude, was a historian and numismatist. Jean-Jacques, like his father before him, studied in Padua, an important center for culture and sciences, and was well traveled. A much-appreciated scholar, he published a great deal over the course of his life on history, heraldry, numismatics and archaeology, often in opulent, illustrated editions.<sup>13</sup> His publication on the shrouds of Jesus contained a total of 36 chapters and a good number of illustrations. Pingone had included only three small engravings of rather poor execution in his encomiastic writing on the Turin linen. Visually redundant, they all illustrated “coins” showing an angel holding up high the shroud on one side and a duke of Savoy on the other.<sup>14</sup> Chifflet, by contrast, in his plea for the Besançon winding sheet, used a noteworthy visual strategy, arraying a series of ten finely executed engravings, five of which I will look at more closely.<sup>15</sup>

At the core of the tract was the linen cloth, which as a devotional object was said to have performed a variety of roles in the past and present times of the

12 Cf. Nicolotti 2015.

13 Chifflet’s volume, *Anastasis Childerici I. Francorum regis, sive thesaurus sepulchralis Tornaci Nerviorum effossus et Commentario illustrates*, commissioned by his employer, the governor of the Spanish Netherlands Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria, and published in 1655 also at Plantin’s press in Antwerp, continues to be viewed as a noteworthy scholarly archaeological enquiry.

14 In Pingone’s account, the shroud would have come to the West, and more specifically to Chambéry, only in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, during the reign of Louis, duke of Savoy. Pingone reproduced the “coin” (“nummus”) Louis supposedly had minted to commemorate and celebrate the acquisition of the shroud. If such an object was produced – no exemplar has been found – it would have served as a commemorative medal and not as a means of payment. Pingone illustrated three pieces from different times, one commemorating the visit to the shroud in Turin by Carlo Borromeo in 1578. Cf. Nicolotti 2015, 163–168. Chifflet 1624, in one of the chapters dedicated to the Turin shroud in his tract, chapter 20, 120, mentions these “coins” and reproduces the first one, following Pingone: “Placuit hic unum omnium vetustissimum reddere ex Pongonio.”

15 The other illustrations are briefly mentioned in footnotes 14, 27, 28 and 29 respectively.

city. The well-orchestrated argument touched on multiple aspects of the relic with the aim of legitimizing the existence of a second burial shroud of Christ, proving its authenticity and its devotional importance. Ancient Jewish funerary rites were thus at the treatise's center, and specifically those performed after the death of Jesus, in an effort to adduce unequivocal historical evidence that explained the size, appearance and exact function of the textile preserved in Besançon. Chifflet started out with a general discussion of the burial customs of antiquity. Certain aspects were of particular interest to him, especially the importance and rightness of laying bodies to rest in the ground, this being the oldest kind of burial and a pagan anticipation of the Christian faith in resurrection.<sup>16</sup> The following pages dealt with the rites of conservation of dead bodies, namely the types, shapes and materials of the fabrics involved and the way the rites had spread from the Egyptians to other peoples. A detailed and thorough explanation of all the single steps was necessary, as the author wrote, because the Gospels stated that Jesus had been buried following these rites. As there had been and still were frequent debates on the subject, mainly on the number and function of the textiles used, these points were to be defined once and for all so as to allow for a dispassionate analysis and decisive and necessary clarification of the matter.<sup>17</sup> Chifflet went on to deepen the discussion of Egyptian burial, giving rich details on how the corpse was covered with a byssus shroud adhering to the body and how it was subsequently wrapped with linen cut into strips, on the way the arms were crossed over the chest and on the special bandages and straps for the head. In the context of this description, the author introduced his first illustration: the image of an *antiquitas*, an Egyptian statuette integrated into the page layout, as he explicitly stated, offered further clarification to the readers (fig. 1).

It was a valuable piece of visual evidence, deliberately reproduced against a neutral background and carefully chosen, as Chifflet pointed out, as the only example known to the author bearing no hieroglyphic marks, allowing the on-lookers to concentrate solely on the wrapping method.<sup>18</sup>

16 Chifflet 1624, 4.

17 Chifflet 1624, 6: "Aegyptijs & Iudaeis, qui abluta & aromatis medicata cadavera linteis candidis involvere: quo ritu Christum Servatorem sepultum legimus in Evangelio, ubi dicitur: Acceperunt corpus Jesu, & ligaverunt illud linteis cum aromatibus, sicut mos est Iudaeis sepelire. Qui sane mos, licet prima fronte cuius clarus & perspicuus videatur; non pauci tamen Criticis occurrunt nodi circa eum, & in numero linteorum, & in ratione involucris; quos omnes solvere intendimus, ut linteorum Christi sepulchralium crisis expeditior sit."

18 Chifflet 1624, 13: "Unicum hic exhibemus, absque notis hieroglyphicis, ut involucris ratio melius percipiat." In his observations Chifflet repeatedly referred to Polish duke Nicolaus Christophorus Radzivilus' account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land (*Hierosolymitana Peregrinatio*, Brunsbergae: Georgius Schönfels, 1601), and specifically to Radzivilus' description of such small statuettes found in Egyptian graves.



vti cenſeo, quonam condituræ ritu, cadauera ſingula fuiſſent medicata; an cum hieroglyphicis ſignis & notis, in modum ſepulti Oſiridis, cuius nomen *ἀνερπώνητον* ob reuerentiam præterit Herodotus; an alijs duabus minoris ſumptus condituris; quòve pigmenti artificio, rubrone, ſubuiridi, an cæruleo: cuiuſmodi Gabbaras illos fictitios pleroſque vidimus, & domi habemus, in quadrangulam baſim deſinentes, cui tota effigies reſta inſiſtit. Vnicum hîc exhibemus, abſque notis hieroglyphicis, vt inuolucris ratio meliùs percipiatur.

Sindone primùm byſſinâ, ab imâ ceruice uſque ad pedes, corpus inuolutum eſt: & loris incifis circumligatum, quæ tamen ob gummi denſius illitum non apparent: cubiti decuſſatim ſe premunt ſub linteo, ita vt manus dextra in ſiniſtro pectoris latere, ſiniſtra in dextro videatur: ſupremo capiti ve-



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Fig. 1: Egyptian statuette, engraving in Jean-Jacques Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus Christi Servatoris crisis historica* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1624), © Universitätsbibliothek Mannheim, <https://digi.bib.uni-mannheim.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:180-digad-3863>.

Having offered documentation on different categories of Egyptian burial, Chifflet had prepared the ground for contrasting these rather elaborate rites with the more ordinary ones most commonly used by the Jews in Palestine: chapter 4, *Ritus sepulturae Iudaicae duplex: mortui loti, uncti, involuti. Christi funerationi adhibita Sindon, Sudarium, linteamina, institae* (The twofold rite of Jewish burial: the dead washed, anointed, wrapped. The sindon used for the funerary rite of Christ, the sudarium, the linen cloths, the bandages), and the four chapters that followed represent a decisive part within the treatise. The Besançon author repeatedly referred to “Rabbi Jacob” as an important source. Surely, the highly influential medieval legal scholar Jacob Ben Asher is meant, who in *Yoreh De’ah*, the second section of his compilation of Jewish law, discussed mourning for the dead and burial rites.<sup>19</sup> Working his way through the detailed information on funerary procedure, with frequent comparisons and references to classical and biblical text passages, Chifflet recounted the individual steps: the closing of the eyes, the shaving of the hair (with the specification, quoting the ecclesiastical historian Cardinal Baronius,<sup>20</sup> that it was not performed in the case of Jesus because he was a convict), the washing, the anointing and the wrapping of the body. A careful distinction between the various fabrics used in the process was crucial for the erudite author, in particular in the case of the “sindon” and the “sudarium”, whereby the first term, according to Chifflet, referred to the linen cloths that, following the evangelist John, were folded in one part of the tomb, whereas the second described a cloth that had been on the face of Jesus and that was found put down in a different area of the tomb. Comparison with the vocabulary used in the Gospel of John to describe Jesus’ last miracle before his crucifixion, the resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany four days after Lazarus’ burial, was important in Chifflet’s eyes, as was a discussion of some of the central terms on a linguistic level. *Sindon* and *sudarium*, the author remarked, were often used as synonyms, but the words had very different etymologies and meanings.<sup>21</sup> Chifflet was convinced that in matters of religion and faith it was essential to avoid mere references to miracles and one should instead draw on arguments and facts.<sup>22</sup> Well aware of the fame of the Turin shroud but also of the fierce criticism of relic cults brought forth by many, in particular the open challenges posed by Jean Calvin’s successful and widely known treatise

19 The reference given by Chifflet in the right margin of the page is to a work titled *Thurim Iora Degha*. This small distortion might be explained by his having mistaken the last part of one of the names the rabbi was known by, Ba’al ha-Turim, for part of the publication’s title.

20 Caesar Baronius, *Annales ecclesiastici a Christo nato ad annum 1198* (Romae: Typographia Torneriana, 1588–1607).

21 Chifflet 1624, chap. 5.

22 Chifflet 1624, 35.

on relics,<sup>23</sup> Chifflet time and again raised potentially problematic points in his argument for the local shroud and tried to resolve them in a convincing manner. Clarification was needed, for instance, of why the Besançon linen showed both face and body of Jesus and also why no traces were visible of bandages tying hands and feet. In Jewish burial, according to Chifflet's interpretation of his various sources and mainly of the Gospel of John, the so called "sudarium of the head" actually covered all of the anterior body and the head, and the sepulchral bandages were not tied just to the extremities but instead wrapped around the whole body up to the neck after it had been enveloped in the *sudarium*, thus leaving visible the head covered by the cloth.<sup>24</sup> To aid the readers' comprehension of the interpretation of the Gospel text he was proposing, Chifflet had an illustration of the dramatic scene of the raising of Lazarus included in the chapter. The engraving, of a painterly quality, was executed and signed by Cornelis Galle, a well-known illustrator and the son of the major Antwerp editor of prints, Philips Galle (fig. 2).

The figure of Lazarus, still tied in the bandages and with the underlying cloth covering his head, forms the intriguing center of the composition, standing near an opening in the ground that indicates the tomb he has just stepped out from. His two sisters, Mary and Magdalene, and many others surround him, all witnessing the miracle worked by the luminous figure of Jesus depicted on the right. A quotation from John (11:43–44) served as a caption for the image: "Jesus voce magna clamavit, Lazare veni foras, et statim prodijt, qui fuerat mortuus, ligatus pedes et manus institis, et facies eius sudario erat ligata." ("And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." KJV) Chifflet in this instance, too, explicitly commented on his purposeful inclusion of an illustration. In the sentence immediately preceding Galle's engraving, he declared himself convinced that the picture would, as a sensory perception, facilitate an understanding of the event.<sup>25</sup> That the body of Christ after the washing and anointing was wrapped in a linen fabric and then in bandages this very way would also explain the length of the Besançon shroud, which at 8 feet was only half the length of the Turin piece. Still following the description in

23 Chifflet specifically refers to Jean Calvin's *Traité des reliques* (Genève: Pierre de la Rovière, 1543) in chapter 7. On Calvin's tract cf. Fabre/Wilmart 2009.

24 Chifflet 1624, 35–36. Chifflet discussed the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection as described by John. At the same time he pointed to a specific use of language by erudite authors such as Hippocrates and Galen who used the words "hands" and "feet" as a *pars pro toto* for the upper and the lower body respectively.

25 Chifflet 1624, 39: "Sensum nostrum iuvabit haec pictura, Lazarum voce Christi suscitatum, et vinculis nondum solutum exprimens."



artus integri ligari potuerunt, nisi truncus quoque corporis ijsdem fascijs coërcitus est? Sensum nostrum iuuabit hæc pictura, Lazarum voce Christi suscitatum, & vinculis nondum solutum exprimens.



*IESVS voce magna clamauit, Lazare veni foras. et statim produxit, qui fuerat mortuus, ligatus pedes et manus institis, & facies eius sudario erat ligata. Ioh. u.*

Ad illud igitur quod aduersus Vefontinum Sudarium affertur, nego institas in eo notari debuisse, aut

Fig. 2: The raising of Lazarus, engraving by Cornelis Galle in Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus* (1624), © Universitätsbibliothek Mannheim, <https://digi.bib.uni-mannheim.de/urn:urn:nbn:de:bsz:180-digad-3863>.

posito, quâ caput velatum erat: & quia sudarium caput totum complectens à collo religabatur: Lazari facies sudario erat ligata. & pro illo Ioannis, sudarium quod fuerat super caput eius, reddit Testamentum Syriacum, quod ligatum fuerat in capite eius, siue, vt habent Biblia Regia, quo comprehensum fuerat caput eius. Sic igitur Christi corpus inuolu-



Acceperunt corpus Iesu, & ligauerunt illud linteis cum aromatibus, sicut mos est Iudeis sepelire. Ioan. 19.

tum

Fig. 3: The entombment of Jesus, engraving by Cornelis Galle in Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus* (1624) © Universitätsbibliothek Mannheim, <https://digi.bib.uni-mannheim.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:180-digad-3863>.

John, some ten pages later the readers were presented with a second narrative image by Galle, this time showing Christ's entombment (fig. 3).

In the background the crosses of Golgotha are visible. The body of Jesus, which is being carried into the tomb by disciples, is at the center of the composition, head and body enveloped in a linen cloth and wrapped in bandages, rendered in complete conformity with the figure of Lazarus. The caption accompanying the image, again a quote from the Gospel of John (19:40), emphasized the function of this second visualization as further confirmation of Chifflet's argument: "Acceperunt corpus Jesu & ligaverunt illud linteis cum aromatibus, sicut mos est Iudaeis sepelire." ("Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury." KJV)

Not only the proximity of these illustrations within the volume but also their obvious stylistic closeness linked them to each other visually.<sup>26</sup> The two compositions were completely different from all the other illustrations in the book; they worked on an anecdotal, emotionally engaging level, almost suggesting that the readers could witness the biblical scenes.<sup>27</sup> While the paradigmatic type of illustration of *antiquitates* within the treatise – that is of actual objects against a neutral background such as the Egyptian figure in the very beginning of the book<sup>28</sup> – may be considered an example of the erudite man's strategy of persuasion through authority, the syntagmatic tableaux pictorially conveying emotionally highly charged moments within the biblical narrative demonstrate the author's intent to persuade through sensory suggestion.

Given the way Chifflet selected sources and built his argument, the chapters briefly discussed here used what might broadly be characterized as a philologically based approach. By contrast, the next part of the treatise concentrated at length on historical aspects of the supposed provenance of the shroud of

26 It seems noteworthy that the two engravings by Galle were reproduced four decades later, with a direct reference to Chifflet's tract, in *De Pileo*, a work by Théophile Raynaud (1583–1663). The French theologian, a Jesuit like Chifflet's brother Pierre-François Chifflet, was known as a learned man and author. Under the pseudonym Anselmus Solerius he published *De Pileo* (Amsterdam: Andreae Frisii, 1671), a fascinating volume on headgear in different times and cultures, which also discussed Chifflet's argument on the funerary shrouds of Christ.

27 In chapter 28, *De sepulchralibus Christi Domini fasciis distinctius*, Chifflet returned to this point and gave it additional emphasis, also visually, by illustrating and commenting on the copy, by Peter Paul Rubens, of an antique representation of an infant wrapped in bandages and on the example of two depictions found in Rome that, though not technically refined, clearly documented how the dead body was covered first with a shroud over the head and then with bandages wrapped around it. Cf. Chifflet 1624, 171–172.

28 Chifflet 1624, 46. The author made repeated use of illustrations of *antiquitates*, such as an ancient carnelian intaglio or, in the concluding part of the treatise, a byzantine coin that will be briefly discussed below, cf. *infra*, fig. 5.



Besançon from Palestine<sup>29</sup> and, further, on several miracles worked by the relic and perceived to be, in their own right, proofs of its importance and testimonies of an individually and collectively lived faith.<sup>30</sup> Various subsequent chapters were concerned with the shroud of Turin, its travels, history and the miracles it worked. There followed a few chapters on other famous textile relics. In the last part of *De linteis sepulchralibus*, Chifflet offered the readers a detailed comparison of the shrouds of Turin and Besançon. He wrote that with regard to the shroud in Turin his discussion was based only on books, images and archival material. His description of the Besançon cloth, however, was extremely precise not only because he saw it regularly, twice a year, during its public ostensions, but also because he had been allowed, in the spring of 1623, to examine the precious textile alone, for three hours, in Saint-Etienne. A painter accompanying him for this purpose had made an image of the shroud that measured one foot.<sup>31</sup> Chifflet here highlighted the importance of autopsy, of direct observation, a characteristic tenet of antiquarian erudition. On the ground of the expertise he had acquired, the author, systematically using the first person, offered his readers rich information about the material object that was at the center of his disquisition, always comparing it with the Turin shroud: the color and the exact measurements of the linen and of the figure, the symmetry of the body, the position of the arms and of the wounds, and the loin cloth – visible on the Turin cloth, which had enveloped the body of Jesus after the deposition from the cross, but absent from the Besançon linen, which had been used after the washing and anointing of the naked body. It is in this context, in chapter 32, that probably the most remarkable illustration of Chifflet's tract is presented, an engraving showing the Turin and the Besançon shrouds together (fig. 4).

This was the first visual rendering of the linen of Besançon in a print medium. The engraving of the two cloths is the only one not integrated into the text. A folding plate of horizontal format, the size of a double page, it is significantly larger than any other illustration in the tract. The Turin shroud, front and back, takes up the upper part of the plate, the two sides of the body mirroring each

29 In this context, Chifflet referred to the cover, carved in ivory, of a very old copy of the Gospels in the local church of Saint-Jean and illustrated it (Chifflet 1624, 61–62). In chapter 6 the author had already raised the question of the historic provenance for his shroud, arguing that it might have been mentioned in early sources such as the Venerable Bede.

30 On the cult devoted to the shroud of Besançon cf. Spinelli-Flesch 2004.

31 Chifflet 1624, 185: “In Vesontina autem ut essem accuratissimus, effecit, qua frequens illus aspectus, bis in anno, cum publice explicari solet; qua spectatissimorum insignis Capituli Metropolitani Canonico-rum singularis humanitas, de quorum decreto, adorandum Sudarium, tertia lunij huius anni M. DC. XXIII. septima die quam populo exhibitum fuerat, a senis ex eorum coetu linteatis, in id muneris delectis, multa circum ardente face depositum est, ac mihi uni, arbitro dum taxat pictore, in minore Basilicae S. Stephani Sacratio propositum, tres ipsas horas, ut qualibet sacrae iconis mensuras caperem, eiusque depingi curarem expressissimam, quoad fieri posset, imaginem, pedali longitudine.”

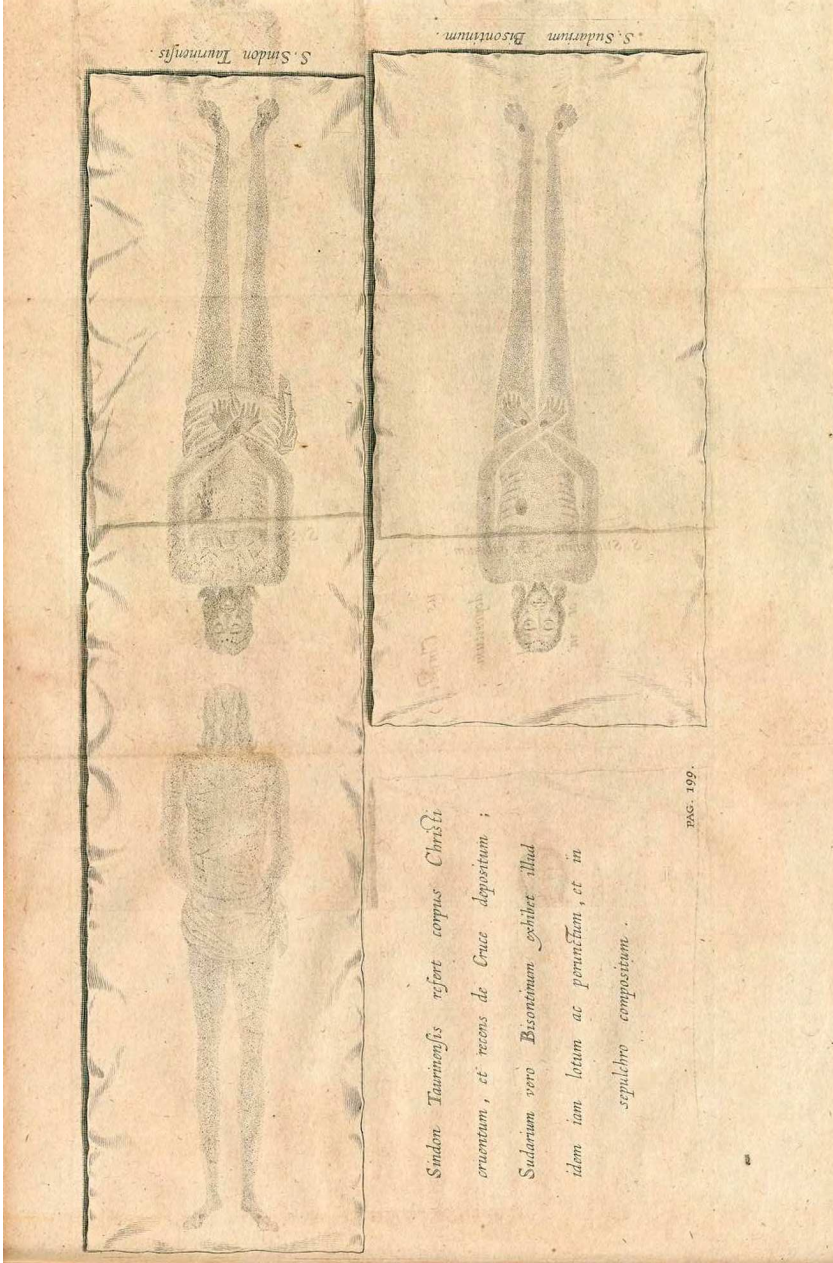


Fig. 4: The shrouds of Turin and Besançon, engraving in Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus* (1624), © Universitätsbibliothek Mannheim, <https://digi.bib.uni-mannheim.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:180-digad-3863>.

other. The Besançon shroud is placed below it on the right. Each piece is labeled, as “S. Sindon Taurinensis” and “S. Sudarium Bisontinum” respectively. Against the neutral background, a sinuous fine line with darker areas surrounds each representation, a trompe-l’oeil meant to simulate the materiality of the linen, the creases in the fabric and the shadows they cast. Both shrouds are positioned horizontally on the paper, in a pictorial correspondence to the actual presentation of the venerated textile objects. During the ostensions at Easter and on Ascension Day, the shrouds were shown to the public, the barely visible images on the linen marking the trace left by the body, which by its very absence calls attention to the miracle of Christ’s resurrection. The representations of the prone figures on the two shrouds appear, indeed, to be deliberately faint, clearly intended to convey the impression of a mere trace and seeking to avoid any association by an onlooker with paintings.

The plate, aptly positioned in the last part of the tract, is noteworthy in many respects. It was a new visual creation, evidently commissioned by Chifflet from a local craftsman, probably Jean de Loysi, who on the basis of this first engraving went on to produce, quite successfully, a rich iconographic variety of printed images of the Besançon shroud for pilgrims.<sup>32</sup> Typologically, Loysi’s representation was close to those of *antiquitates* in the treatise and, unlike the two narrative illustrations by Galle, had no particular aesthetic ambition. Its declared function was one of pure documentation. Still, the image was more than just a supposedly faithful reproduction. The concurrent presentation in a single plate of the smaller, until then less-publicized local relic with the famous shroud of Turin was conceptually bold, a targeted confrontation that was meant to reach a broader audience through the chosen medium of print, raise the status of the Besançon cloth and publicize it further. It was an invitation to the onlookers to verify the book’s contention: they were to establish the conclusiveness of the explanations offered by Chifflet for each and every congruence as well as for all the differences between the two shrouds. The simultaneous visualization of both objects in one *illustratio*, with the long caption on the lower left side carefully differentiating the “sindon” from the “sudarium” on a linguistic level and on a functional level,<sup>33</sup> synthesized the essence of Chifflet’s argument and thorough investigation, clarifying, quite literarily, the complementarity of the two textiles and their equal importance as holy touch relics of Christ.

The medium of engraving is one of mechanical reproduction; it reproduced a linen cloth, but what it really showed, as Chifflet had set out to prove, was not

32 The name was later spelled Loysi. On the attribution to Loysi and the local production of printed images cf. Marcelli 2004, 71–75.

33 The caption reads as follows: “Sindon Taurinensis refert Corpus Christi cruentum et recens de Cruce depositum; Sudarium vero Besontinum exhibit illud jam lotus ac perunctum, et in Sepulchro compositum.”

the reproduction of an original, but the reproduction of an original that had left a trace, an imprint of itself on the cloth. Christ was the original, the prototype present in each relic of his. While the Besançon author in the chapters leading up to the central plate with the two shrouds had concentrated on the description of the actual object preserved in his hometown, the overarching purpose of the treatise transcended the pure materiality and appearance of the linen textile. The cloth was said and had now been demonstrated to be a touch relic of Christ, a proof of his historical, physical presence on earth and at the same time of his divine nature and resurrection. It needed, to complete the argument advanced by the author, to be situated within a much broader context of faith and devotion, of the immense challenges posed by any attempt to represent the incommensurability of the dual nature of Jesus as fully human and fully divine. This was Chifflet's concern in the final section of his treatise and the very last illustration referred to the broader context of *acheiropoieton* images – images that were not made by the hand of man, but were instead traces of Jesus' presence on earth purposely left by him.<sup>34</sup> The object chosen by the erudite author to visualize this point was a coin. Chifflet had a great interest in numismatics and was aware of the quality and particularity of a medium that in its own right could be considered a very specific vehicle for the representation, interpretation, circulation and reception of iconographies, in this case related to Jesus.<sup>35</sup> In his opinion, various coins, among them one of Justinian II he had, as he noted, seen in person, testified to the historical presence of such an *acheiropoieton* image in Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> The small engraving in *De linteis sepulchralibus* showed a famous gold solidus of the Byzantine emperor, who during his first rule minted a series of gold and silver coins bearing on the obverse the image – believed to be the rendering of an *acheiropoieton* cloth – of a blessing Christ with long hair and a beard, shown from the chest up, with the Gospels in his left hand and his right hand raised in benediction, and on the reverse the emperor<sup>37</sup> (fig. 5).

Against the background of the theological debates of his time and particularly in light of the highly controversial nature of his topic, Chifflet, in the very last chapter of his treatise, had to take a stand and offer his readers an explicit

34 Cf. Finaldi 2000; Morello/Wolf 2000; Wolf/Dufour Bozzo/Calderoni Masetti 2004; Frommel/Wolf 2006.

35 *De linteis* was the first book with numismatic references published by the Plantin press. Cf. Watershoot 2005, 346.

36 Chifflet 1624, 212: “Nummi Tiberij & Iustiniani nomine cusi id videntur innuere, in quibus aversis effigies Christi usurpata primum conspicitur, a divina illa Imagine forsitan mutuata. [...] Iustiniani solidus, etiam ex auro, vidi alias hac forma.”

37 The numismatic imagery related to Jesus recalls the iconography of the Pantocrator. Still, it was contended time and again that it was derived from an Edessan-sindonic archetype. The Byzantine numismatic iconography has remained up to today a much-discussed topic in sindonologist debate. Cf. Nicolotti 2014, 173–182.



212 DE LINTEIS SEPVLCHR. CHRISTI  
 sti, vbi hæc leguntur: Διήνοις αὐτοῦ τῷ ἀρχιεπισκοπῇ  
 εἰκόνι, τῷ Κυρίῳ ὃ Θεὸς ὁ Σωτὴρ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς.  
*Narratio de non manu factâ imagine Domini &  
 Dei & Saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi.* Et verò  
 coniicere auserim, iam tunc in acie prælatam (an-  
 no Christi D.LXXXI.) cùm Tiberius Regem Per-  
 farum Chosdroëm, post obitum Iustini, Ro-  
 manum Imperium inuadentem, per strenuif-  
 simos Duces Iustinianum Iustini nepotem &  
 Mauritium variis præliis fudit; ipsamque Persi-  
 dem penitus deuastauit. Nummi Tiberij & Iu-  
 stiniani nomine cusi id videntur innuere, in qui-  
 bus auersis effigies Christi vsurpata primùm con-  
 spicitur, à diuinâ illâ Imagine forsitan mutuata:  
 aureum vnum sic describit Nummographus:

D. N. IVSTINIANVS ET TIBERIVS PP. A. *duæ facies.*

D. N. IHS. CHRIST. REX REGNANTIVM. *imago Christi  
 cum cruce.* alterum Iustiniani solius, etiam ex  
 auro, vidialia hac formâ:



Fig. 5: Gold solidus of Justinian II, engraving in Chifflet, *De linteis sepulchralibus* (1624), ©  
 Universitätsbibliothek Mannheim, <https://digi.bib.uni-mannheim.de/urn/urn:nbn:de:bsz:180-digad-3863>



answer to the question about the admissibility of the veneration of relics and, more broadly, of images. He did so by referring to the Council of Trent, to the twenty-fifth and last session and the decree on the veneration of images, in which the legitimacy of such forms of devotion was reaffirmed.<sup>38</sup> Relics such as the shroud of Besançon, Chifflet concluded, could be venerated by virtue of the prototype they represented; such a *latria* was legitimate because it was devoted, through the images, to Christ.

## ALMOST THE SAME IMAGE – CLOSING REMARKS

If images play an eminent role in a system of religious symbols and, more broadly, in a system of social communication and if they are carriers of meaning, conveying values and norms and at the same time forming them, and if they are, as Hans Belting has put it, the “nomads of media”,<sup>39</sup> then it is certainly worthwhile asking about the specificity of a given set of images and media and their qualities in a given social and historical context. Relic cults such as the one in Besançon were a phenomenon that was as religious as it was political, propagandistic and economic. To believers and worshippers, the veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa or the holy shroud were purposeful “self-reproductions”, mechanical traces, or rather imprints, of Christ’s face and body left by him on pieces of cloth for the benefit of humankind. They were valued and venerated as tangible records of Christ’s historical existence as well as signs of his continuing presence in the world.<sup>40</sup> In the context of possible proofs of the physical existence of Jesus in the early modern period, scholarly disquisitions about such touch relics played their own singular role, necessarily addressing theological and religious problems. Chifflet’s tract, edited by an internationally esteemed and well-connected publishing house, deserves consideration for both its production and its circulation as a contribution to and a facet of a particular narrative of religion – in this case by an erudite author who was also politically partisan and a practicing Catholic.

Narrative choices depend on circumstances and objectives, and images are an important means of conveying information, of eliciting emotion and of affecting viewers. As shown, in his selection of illustrations, Chifflet availed himself of different visual strategies. The large plate juxtaposing the two shrouds of Turin and Besançon was at the heart of the tract, intentionally prepared with its impact in mind, which was reinforced by both the written argu-

38 De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum, et de sacris imaginibus, 3 December 1563, 25th Session.

39 Belting 2005, 310: “Images resemble nomads in the sense that they take residence in one medium after another.”

40 Belting 1998.

ment and the selection and sequence of the images it contained. Since this article has focused on the illustrative practice deployed by Chifflet to position his local shroud within the broader debate on relics of Jesus, it is surely pertinent to look a bit further, in conclusion, at how material sources were treated in various media – that is at their pictorial translation into print and their contextualization – by pointing to one very particular reception of the Besançon author’s central visual argument.

Around one century after its first publication, the key illustration of *De lintheis sepulchralibus Christi* was used in an encyclopaedic enterprise of the early Enlightenment, the *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (*The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Several Nations of the Known World*), edited by Jean-Frédéric Bernard, a Huguenot man of letters, and published by him between 1723 and 1737 in Amsterdam in seven magnificently illustrated folio volumes.<sup>41</sup> The artist responsible for the iconographic program, Bernard Picart, was a French exile, well integrated into the Protestant community in Amsterdam. He was highly conscious of the function and formal possibilities of printed images as instruments of mediation and communication.<sup>42</sup> The *Cérémonies* was a rich compilation on the religious customs of the whole world that included more than 250 plates with illustrations. The work devoted much attention to the ceremonies of Roman Catholics. The selection of texts and images in that section, although essentially based on Catholic sources, clearly was meant as a targeted attack on the Roman Catholic Church. In the first volume of the *Cérémonies*, within the “Suite de la Dissertation sur les Ceremonies des Catholiques Romains” (“Continuation of the Dissertation upon the *Cérémonies* of the Roman Catholics”), a brief chapter on the shroud of Jesus followed right after one dedicated to the benediction of images and before one on the benediction of the papal vestments.<sup>43</sup> The text informed its readers of the existence of two famous shrouds in Europe that had been discussed extensively by Chifflet.<sup>44</sup> The engraving from *De lintheis sepulchralibus* was now integrated into a sequence of plates showing the pompous ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church on special occasions and a seemingly endless array of priestly ceremonies performed regularly, among them the benediction of crosses, altars, church bells and sacred images. The original composition had been modified in various ways, by cutting, turning and reassembling its elements. These made

41 Cf. von Wyss-Giacosa 2006; Hunt/Jacob/Mijnhardt 2010.

42 Cf. von Wyss-Giacosa forthcoming.

43 *Cérémonies* 1723, 113–115, “Le Saint Suaire”.

44 *Cérémonies* 1723, 113: “Il y a deux fameux Suaire en Europe, celui de Bezançon & celui de Turin, Chifflet a fait l’Histoire de l’un & de l’autre.”

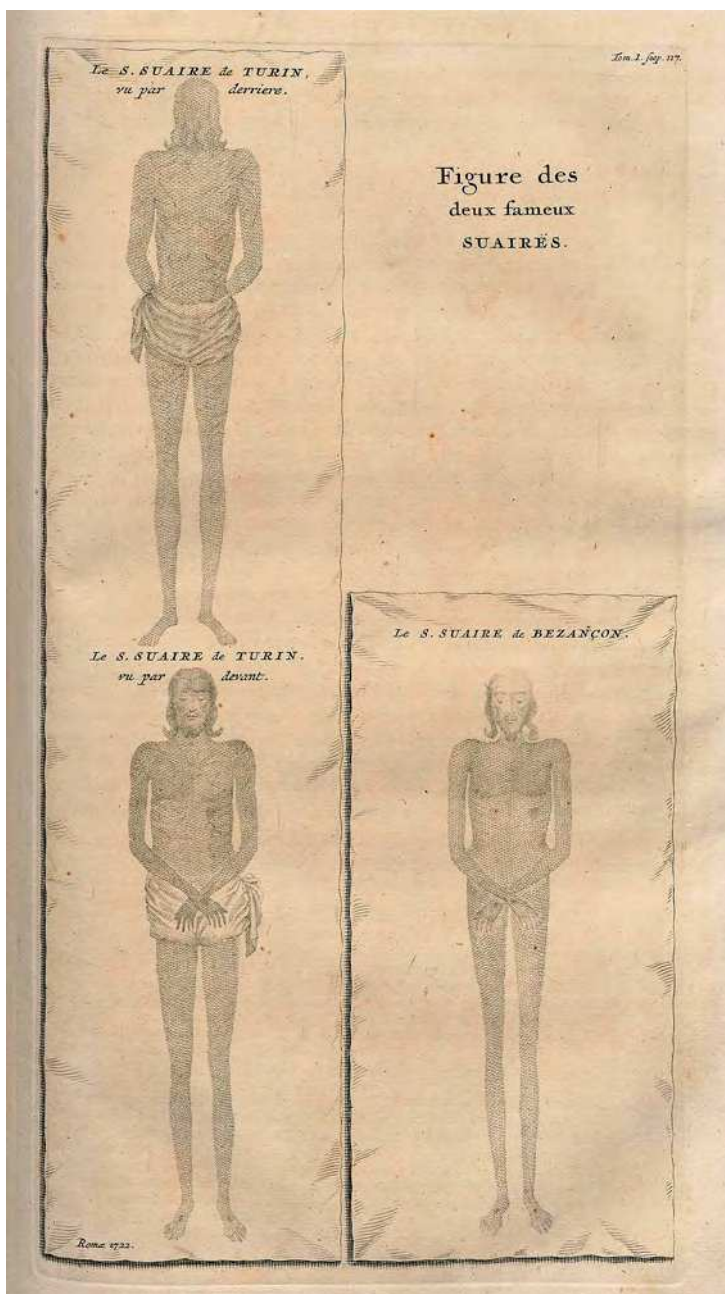


Fig. 6: The shrouds of Turin and Besançon, engraving in *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, vol. 1, 1723 © private collection.

the illustration in the *Cérémonies* seem rather strange, if not outright absurd (fig. 6).

The two sides of the shroud of Turin no longer mirrored each other, as would be the case for imprints of one body on a cloth. Instead, the front and back representations were arranged on the left side, one below the other, both with the head up, the back view above, but still surrounded by a soft contour simulating the borders of the cloth, making them appear as a sort of awkward duplication. The Besançon linen was on the lower right. The whole page was oriented vertically. The three figures now seemed to be paintings on canvas rather than winding sheets, an effect increased by the individual labels for each one and the caption in the upper right quarter of the page.<sup>45</sup> Through targeted variations in its rendering, the pictorial message conceived and circulated by Chifflet was challenged polemically and, indeed, compellingly on its own terms. This new representation of the relics, close enough to the original to be recognized by the public as a visual quote and yet deftly distinct from it, made all the difference in the intended impact and effect of the illustration. It now seemed to serve as one more piece of evidence for the absurdities and manipulations concocted by priests all over the world and most particularly by the Roman Catholic Church. Such was, in fact, the goal of Bernard and Picart's editorial endeavor, as a plea against empty formulae. Their work was intended as a contribution to the ridiculing and thus unmasking of all paraphernalia and ceremonies. In the case of the shroud of Besançon, a strategy of provocative visual confrontation thus preceded the French Revolution's more drastic strategy of *abolitio memoriae*, with the former, which certainly had impact and is deserving of mention in its own right, seeking not to eliminate its object from sight but rather to make its target visible.

As this analysis of *De linteis sepulchralibus* and the reference to a small chapter in its later treatment has shown, making visible can mean different things, intend different things and, indeed, have entirely different results. Chifflet's treatise, in its genesis and changing reception, offers a many-layered testimonial of the central role of visibility in the dynamic process of a cultural practice of producing and sharing, of representing and circulating notions and meanings.

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45 Le S. SUAIRE de TURIN, vu par derrière; Le S. SUAIRE de TURIN, vu par devant; Le S. SUAIRE de BESANÇON. "Figure des deux fameux SUAIREs".

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